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ABSTRACT

The report provides an overview of the academic preparation of a sample of prospective candidates for the ministry. Data were drawn from the records of approximately 12,000 students taking the Graduate Record Examinations (GRE) from 1981-1988. It was found that during this period, 1,000-1,500 applicants to Masters of Divinity programs took the GRE each year, and about 28 percent were women. Women applicants earned higher GRE scores than men, and their undergraduate grades were higher. In 1988, half the women and one-third of the men were over age 30. Seminary applicants who majored in religion or theology as undergraduates earned lower average GRE scores than applicants who majored in other areas. One-fourth of the sample received honors or recognition for community service while in college. Half the women and 36 percent of the men indicated that their enrollment would depend on receiving financial aid. A list of institutions receiving GRE scores, by denomination, is appended. (Contains 15 references.) (Author/MSE)

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ED 397 765

Ministry Research Notes

*An ETS Occasional Report* *Fall 1990*

# *Academic Preparation of Master of Divinity Candidates*

**Jerilee Grandy • Mark Greiner**

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## Highlights

- Between 1981 and 1988, from 1,000 to 1,500 applicants to Master of Divinity programs took the Graduate Record Examinations (GRE) each year.
- About 28 percent of these applicants were women.
- Women applicants earned higher GRE scores than men, and their undergraduate grades were higher.
- In 1988, half of the women and one-third of the men were over age 30.
- Seminary applicants who majored in religion or theology as undergraduates earned lower average GRE scores than applicants who majored in other areas.
- One-fourth of the sample received honors or recognition for community service while in college.
- One-half of the women and 36 percent of the men indicated that their enrollment would depend on receiving financial aid.

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## INTRODUCTION

Candidates preparing for ordination in the Protestant, Roman Catholic and Jewish faiths undergo a thorough, lengthy, and rigorous assessment of their personal characteristics and qualities. This screening process, however, tends to focus more on maturity and emotional stability than on academic achievement.

In a recent survey of 157 of the 202 seminaries accredited by the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), Dr. Sue Webb Cardwell (1990) reported that the two assessment instruments used most frequently by seminaries and schools of theology were the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory. Only 10 institutions made use of some measure of intellectual or academic achievement such as the Miller Analogies Test or the Graduate Record Examinations (GRE).

Seminaries and schools of theology generally regard psychological balance and stability as important criteria for selection. Academic achievement plays a lesser role. Seminaries do not administer a common entrance examination, nor do they generally require that their applicants submit scores from a standardized test, as the law schools and medical schools do. Most graduate schools require that their applicants take the GRE, whether they are applying in humanities, sciences, engineering, or in the helping professions of psychology, education, social work, or health fields.

Without standard measures of academic skills for their entering students, seminaries and the denominations that support them have little concrete information on the academic strengths and weaknesses of their students and the needs they may have for remedial instruction. Nor do seminaries have a clear idea of the entering student's critical thinking and reasoning skills or knowledge of subject areas.

This report is an attempt to provide an overview of the academic preparation of a sample of prospective candidates for the ministry. We drew all information from the records of students who took the GRE from 1981 to 1988. As we noted, very few seminaries accredited by the Association of Theological Schools require GRE scores for admission to Master of Divinity (M.Div.) programs. During the 1980s, to our knowledge, only three denominations — the United Methodist Church, and the Reform and Conservative movements in Judaism — required the GRE of their candidates for ordination. Some seminaries require GRE scores only when they are unsure of a candidate's academic preparation; others require GRE scores only for admission to doctoral programs. Although the GRE is not generally required for seminary admission, we estimate that each year during the 1980s approximately 1,500 to 2,000 of the roughly 8,500 persons who enrolled as first-year Master of Divinity students took the Graduate Record Examinations.

## SELECTION OF A SAMPLE OF PROSPECTIVE M.Div. STUDENTS

Each year, over 200,000 people take the GRE; most of these people plan to enroll in graduate school. When they register for the exam, more than 80 percent complete a background questionnaire about their intended field of study, degree objective, undergraduate major and specific courses taken, undergraduate grade averages, honors and awards received, work and community activities, parental education, and other information. Of those who enroll in graduate school the next year, more than 80 percent enroll in the field they indicated in the background questionnaire (Grandy, 1990).

The GRE record could not tell us specifically whether an examinee planned to earn a Master of Divinity degree. Instead, we had to infer their intent from other pieces of information.

The background questionnaire used between 1981 and 1987 asked examinees to indicate which fields they planned to study, from a list of 100 major fields. "Religion" was listed, but "theology" was not. We did not regard the respondents' selection of religion as sufficient evidence that they planned to become ordained

ministers. However, we also had other pieces of information, including the highest degree they planned to earn and the names of the institutions to which they had score reports sent. When examinees had scores sent to an ATS affiliated seminary, and indicated that they planned to earn a Master's degree as their terminal degree, we inferred that they were considering the ministry as a profession and defined them as "prospective M.Div. students." Examinees who planned to study "religion" at a university with an ATS affiliated seminary and who planned to earn a master's degree were also included in the sample.

We realized that not all examinees sending scores to seminaries and planning to earn a master's degree would necessarily be planning to enter the ministry. Some, for example, may have been interested in religious education, but there was no way to determine who these individuals were. Furthermore, some examinees had alternative plans. One, for example, selected architecture as a major field preference, but sent GRE scores both to a university and to a seminary. We interpreted these actions as an indication that he was considering ministry as well as architecture, and included him in the sample. Therefore, the sample that we identified as prospective M.Div. students should be regarded as overinclusive; it includes some people considering ministry as one alternative and others planning to earn master's degrees in seminaries for reasons other than ordained ministry.

In the 1988 revision of the background questionnaire, the list of major fields was expanded to include theology. Unfortunately, for that year, we did not have the institutions to which they sent score reports. The definition of "prospective M.Div. students" that we used for 1988 was simply those examinees who indicated they planned to study theology and to earn a Master's degree as their terminal degree. This definition is also overinclusive, in that it includes people who planned to earn a master's degree in theology for reasons other than entering the ministry.

In summary, we defined "prospective M.Div. students" (or simply "prospectives") as those people who indicated: (1) that their scores should be sent to a seminary (available in 1981 through 1987 data only); (2) that they intended to pursue the study of theology (1988 data only); and (3) that the highest degree they sought was the master's. We make no claim that these students actually enrolled in a Master of Divinity program, only that they signaled their intent to do so.

## NATURE OF THE SAMPLE

In a search of more than 1.5 million GRE records from 1981 to 1988, we identified some 12,000 persons who fit our description of "prospectives." On comparing their records with the population of entering seminary students, we noted one difference. According to the 1987 ATS Fact Book, women make up 22 percent of all M.Div. candidates; in our GRE sample, they constituted about 28 percent.

The number of prospective M.Div. students in our sample declined from 1,840 in 1981 to 1,442 in 1987 and then to 1,154 in 1988. The sharp decline between 1987 and 1988 is probably due to the change in definition of "prospective M.Div. students," necessitated by the questionnaire revision.

The overall decline included both men and women, though the greater decline was among men. We also found that the decline occurred for both Catholics and Protestants. One reported change in denominational policy that might account for the change in the Protestant sample size is that the United Methodist Church no longer requires the GRE of its Master of Divinity candidates.

In spite of the various limitations in our data, "prospectives" were identified in all major denominations and had their score reports sent to a total of 111 of the 202 member institutions of the ATS. The Appendix lists, by denomination, all seminaries to which the "prospectives" sent score reports. Despite the inherent limitations of this type of archival research, the findings are of great interest because

they confirm anecdotal evidence about the changing characteristics of M.Div. candidates, and in addition, because they raise important questions about those candidates. While making no claims that the "prospectives" are representative of the Master of Divinity population as a whole, the sample is large enough — about 15 percent of the entering class for each year we studied — that the patterns that emerge among this group suggest a research agenda for the future.

## GENDER

Women constituted about 28 percent of the total GRE sample sending scores to seminaries and planning to earn a master's degree; 33 percent of those sending scores to Protestant seminaries were women. Over the 1981-1988 period, the percentage of women in the GRE sample remained fairly constant. This finding is puzzling considering that the percentage of graduating women M.Div. students has increased. The graduating M.Div. classes of 1987 were 21.4 percent women (n = 1,496) compared with 15.0 percent (n = 1,018) in 1981 (Association of Theological Schools, 1988). If, however, the number of women graduating from M.Div. programs has been increasing as the ATS data indicate, the figures from the GRE data may indicate that the percentage of women M.Div. graduates will increase still further, since GRE examinees in 1988 are likely to earn M.Div. degrees in 1991 or later.

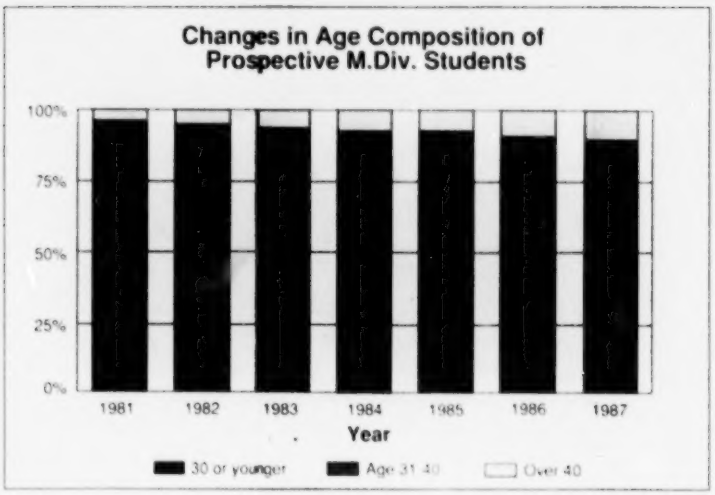
The large proportion of women in the GRE sample and in M.Div. programs is not unique to ministry. While women have traditionally had a small representation among the clergy, women have also been a minority in many professions. But this picture is changing. Since 1986, more master's degrees have been awarded annually to women than to men (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1989). Among all U.S. citizens earning a doctorate in 1988, 41 percent were women (National Research Council, 1989). Furthermore, while many of the female doctorate recipients were in traditional "female" fields, such as health sciences, the number of doctorates awarded to women in traditionally "male" fields was quite high. Thirty-four percent of the doctorates in the sciences went to women.

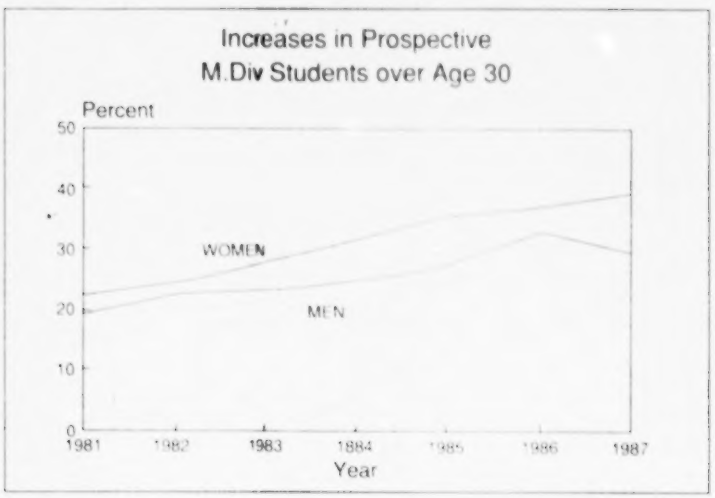
The statistics for people taking the GRE show that only a small number of fields — engineering, physics, and astronomy — attract fewer women than ministry. Considerably more women apply to the other helping professions. In 1987, for example, 82 percent of GRE takers planning to enter social work were women; 68 percent of the prospective psychologists were women; and 76 percent of those planning to study guidance and counseling were women. While ministry now attracts more women than it did in the past, the number of women is still low compared with most other professions.

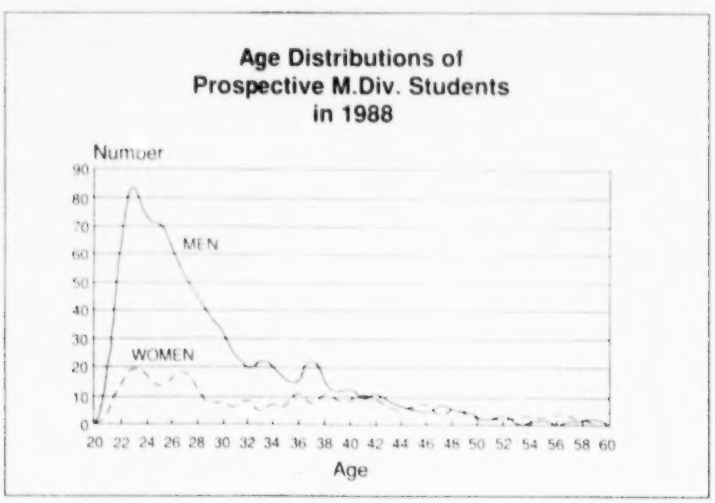
## AGE

Our data from the GRE files suggests that a greater number of older students planned to enter the ministry in 1987 than in 1981. Between those years, the average age of prospective M.Div. students in our sample increased from 26.5 to 28.9. Rather than restricting our analysis to changes in the average age, we looked at changes in age composition within three age ranges: examinees who were 30 or younger, those who were 31 to 40, and those who were over 40. What we observed was a decline of 34 percent in the number of people aged 30 or younger and an increase of 6 percent in the number in their 30s. The number who were over 40 more than doubled in just those six years. The first chart shows the shift in age composition towards an increasing number of older students.

When we compare age increases from 1981 to 1987 between genders, we see the greatest increase in the number of older women examinees (second chart). The percentage of men who were over 30 rose from 19 percent to 29 percent between 1981 and 1987; the percentage of women over 30 rose from 22 percent to 39 percent.




Our observation that prospective M.Div. students are older than they were a decade ago is consistent with enrollment information (Association of Theological Schools, 1988; Carroll, 1981). Fletcher (1980) anticipated that in the next two decades following 1981, there would be an overall drop of 10 percent to 20 percent in the number of 20- to 24-year-old men entering seminary. Although the ATS *Fact Book* does not include age distributions, a study by Carroll, Hargrove, and Lummis (1983) shows that from 1957 to 1981, the women attending seminary tended to do so later in life; fewer came directly from college. Age distributions of male seminarians were less consistent from year to year and did not appear to show the trends seen among female seminarians.

It is important to note that in our sample, ages ranged into the 60s, and that the entire distribution of ages in any single year was quite different for men and women. The third graph shows the full distribution of ages for men and women in 1988.

Women were more evenly distributed across all ages than were men, who still tended primarily to be "college age" or slightly older and probably planning their first career. Over half of the women, but only one-third of the men, were over age 30. There were equal numbers of men and women over 40. These distributions were fairly consistent with the age and gender distributions among first-year seminary students who took Profiles in Ministry, according to analyses we are presently completing. Just as in the GRE sample, 28 percent of those taking Profiles in Ministry were women. (In the next report in this series, we will discuss our analysis of data from Profiles in Ministry.)

The increasing age of seminary students is a phenomenon that is not unique to the ministry. We see a growing number of older examinees in all professions and in the GRE files as well. Between 1981 and 1987, the percentage of people taking the GRE who were over age 30 rose from 22 to 29 percent. We also see that some fields attract older students more than others. In 1987, for example, 46 percent of the people planning to do graduate

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work in education were over age 30, while the percentage of chemistry students over age 30 was a mere 5 percent. The extent to which older people may be entering a particular graduate or professional program depends, to a considerable degree, on the amount of academic preparation required by that field. Education and theology are far more suitable as second careers than chemistry, which requires many years of very specific undergraduate preparation before graduate school.

The increasing number of older M.Div. students can be explained in part by the growing number of women planning to enter ministry — women who have had children and are planning a profession outside of the home. In addition, the increase can be explained by significant changes in the age distribution within the U.S. population. The following census data shows that the "baby-boom effect" has increased the number of middle-aged people in the United States (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1989). Insofar as there have always been some middle-aged people in graduate and professional programs, we would expect that number to increase simply because we have more middle aged people available.

| Age Range | Change in U.S. Population 1981 - 1987 |
|---|---|
| 18 - 24 | 10% decrease |
| 25 - 29 | 9% increase |
| 30 - 34 | 14% increase |
| 35 - 44 | 30% increase |

We may expect that over the next decade or so, as the current 24-year- olds move into middle age, and the current middle-aged group moves into its 50s, the number in the middle-age range will decline. Consequently, the number of "older" students may decline accordingly. Of course, there are other factors besides shifts in the population that contribute to the increase in older students. People's values change. Simply the fact that most of our society no longer expects people to remain in the same job forever, but has begun to view career change as an indication of personal growth, may be sufficient to explain increases in second-career candidates.

## RACE AND CITIZENSHIP

Among the U.S. citizens in the GRE sample of prospective M.Div. students, 92 percent of the men and 90 percent of the women indicated that they were White. Black examinees accounted for less than 3 percent of the men and 7 percent of the women. The female minority population was primarily Black, whereas the male population consisted of a broader representation of minority groups, including Asian American and Hispanic populations.

The number of Black examinees in the GRE sample did not increase dramatically over the eight-year period for which we had data. The number of Black students in ATS-associated schools increased from 4.7 to 6.0 percent in the 1981 to 1987 period (Association of Theological Schools, 1988). The actual numbers (and percentages) of Black examinees are so small in the GRE sample, however, that changes on the order of a few percent cannot be regarded as significant. They most likely represent random fluctuations from year to year.

From 1981 to 1987, the number of noncitizens in our sample increased very slightly from 3 percent to just over 5 percent. Of the noncitizens, the most common country of origin was Korea, though examinees represented many nations.

## GRE SCORES

The GRE General Tests consist of three separate sections: verbal, quantitative, and analytical. Scores on each section can range from 200 to 800. The score for each section should be considered individually, not compared with the scores on the other two sections. It is appropriate to compare scores among different people or

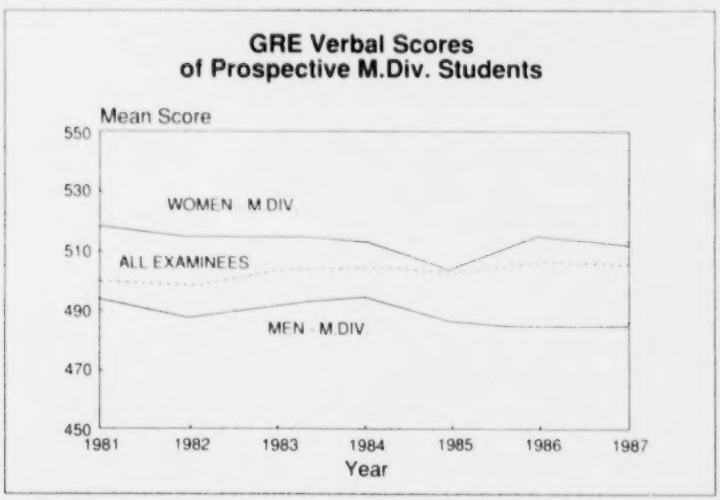
groups of people on the same section.

The GRE verbal section is designed to measure a person's ability to reason with words in solving problems. Verbal reasoning depends on a person's ability to discern, comprehend, and analyze relationships among words in various types of discourse. This section consists of analogies, antonyms, sentence completions, and reading comprehension.

Trends in average verbal scores from 1981 to 1987 showed a decline from 502 to 493 among prospective M.Div. students. In 1988, the average was 508. A likely explanation for the sudden increase is that because the questionnaire was revised in 1988, the sample selected that year was not entirely comparable to the sample selected for the first seven years. We will therefore discuss trends from 1981 to 1987, and then discuss 1988 separately.

While the average scores of "prospectives" declined 9 points, the scores of all U.S. citizens taking the GRE increased from 499 to 505. Whether such a small decline in test score averages could possibly be observed in the academic performance of M.Div. students, however, is questionable.

From 1981 to 1987, the verbal score averages were consistently higher for women than for men each year. On the average, women scored 24 points higher than men. Compared with all U. S. citizens taking the GRE, prospective female M.Div. students obtained scores higher than the average for all test-takers, and prospective male M.Div. students scored lower than average. The graph below compares trends in scores of all U. S. citizens taking the GRE with prospective male and female M.Div. students.




In 1988, the average verbal score for all U.S. citizens taking the GRE was 508. For the prospective M.Div. group, the average was 507, which is not significantly different from the average for the GRE population. The average score for women was 533; for men it was only 496.

The GRE quantitative section is designed to measure basic mathematical skills, understanding of elementary mathematical concepts, and ability to reason quantitatively. The material covered includes arithmetic, algebra, and geometry.

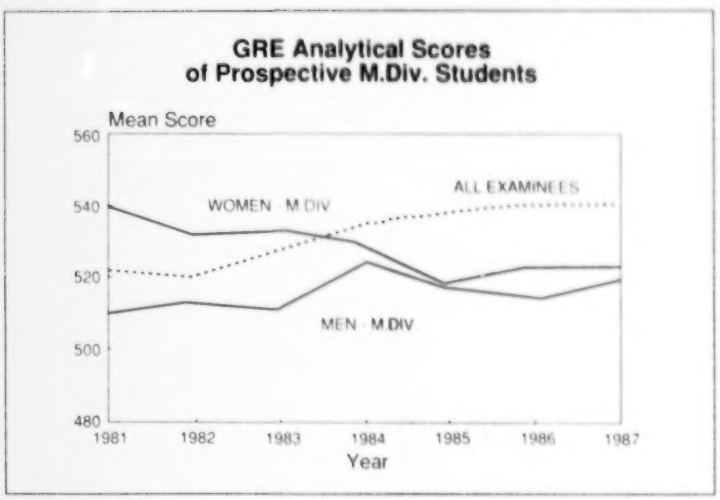
For the population of U.S. citizens taking the GRE, the average quantitative score in 1988 was 537. For prospective M.Div. students, the average in 1988 was 502. This average is somewhat lower than the averages for most other humanities areas, but it is higher than the averages for examinees planning to enter the helping professions of social work, guidance, or education.

The GRE analytical section is designed to measure the ability to think analytically. It contains two types of items: analytical reasoning and logical reasoning. Analytical reasoning questions focus on the ability to analyze a given structure of arbitrary relationships and to deduce new information from that structure. Logical reasoning questions focus on the ability to analyze and critique argumentation by understanding and assessing relationships among arguments or parts of an argument. Both types of items are combined into a single analytical score.

While the quantitative scores of prospective M.Div. students are not highly relevant to a divinity program, their analytical scores may be relevant. The average analytical score for all U.S. citizens taking the GRE in 1988 was 542; for prospective M.Div. students, the average was 517. Women planning to earn an M.Div. obtained higher average scores than men. On the analytical section, men

scored an average of 516 while women scored an average of 522. In the GRE population at large, gender differences are reversed. Generally men and women score about the same in verbal ability, and men score higher than women on quantitative and analytical measures. The fact that women scored higher than men among the prospective M.Div. students may indicate that a more academically select group of women than men are planning to enter the ministry.

Analytical scores showed a curious pattern over time, partly because the test itself changed in its format and emphasis. As the test was modified, the average score increased. Among prospective M.Div. students, however, the score average declined. The following graph shows the analytical score trend for male and female prospective M.Div. students compared with all U.S. citizens taking the GRE.




We can only speculate, unfortunately, as to why scores changed as they did. For those who are concerned about the logical reasoning and critical thinking skills of seminary students, it may be worthwhile to examine sample items in the analytical section to see if they do measure the kinds of skills that are important for students to have acquired in their undergraduate years. If not, the score trend is merely a curiosity.

While it is useful to examine and compare GRE score averages and trends in averages, we should not lose sight of the wide range of scores earned by prospective M.Div. students. Verbal scores ranged over the entire spectrum, from 200 to 790. Gender differences in the distribution were quite pronounced. We found that 33 percent of the women but only 19 percent of the men obtained verbal scores of 600 or higher. We also found some very low scores, some so low that they could be earned by random marking. Quantitative scores also covered a wide range. Several women in the sample had quantitative scores in the high 700s — scores that were well above average even for physicists and mathematicians.

In the GRE population as a whole, there is little or no relationship between age and verbal score. Quantitative scores, on the other hand, tend to decline with age (Clark, 1984). In our sample of prospective M.Div. students, we found the same pattern — older examinees appeared to be no different from their younger colleagues in verbal skills.

## VERBAL SCORES OF STUDENTS ENTERING OTHER FIELDS

Concern has been raised about the overall quality of M.Div. students compared with those in other fields, particularly the professions, and some fear that the "most talented and gifted" students go into other fields (Farley, 1983). Jesse Ziegler, a former executive director of ATS, noted that such concerns are not easy to validate or to disprove. He noted further that data from a 1974 study placed the collegiate grade point average of entering M.Div. students about equal to that of dental students and slightly lower than that of students entering psychology, medicine, and law (Walters-Bugbee, 1981).

The following list shows a rank ordering, from high to low, of the 1987 GRE verbal score averages of U.S. citizens planning to do graduate work in various areas of the humanities, as well as in the helping professions of social work, psychology, and nursing.

| Intended Field of Study | Average GRE-V | Intended Field of Study | Average GRE-V |
|---|---|---|---|
| Classical languages | 610 | Far Eastern Lang/Lit | 518 |
| Philosophy | 595 | Clinical Psychology | 512 |
| Near Eastern Lang/Lit | 582 | Average of all GRE takers | 505 |
| English | 576 | PROSPECTIVE M.DIV. | 493 |
| Comparative Literature | 573 | Architecture | 483 |
| History | 561 | Nursing | 481 |
| Archaeology | 557 | Spanish | 471 |
| Art History | 548 | Education (Teaching) | 463 |
| French | 530 | Social Work | 458 |
| Linguistics | 526 | Guidance | 453 |
| Religion | 522 | | |

On the GRE verbal section, women planning to earn a doctorate in theology scored about 50 points higher than those planning to earn a master's. Men planning to earn a doctorate in theology scored about 40 points higher than men planning to earn a master's. The prospective M.Div. population, therefore, probably fares quite well in comparison with others headed for a master's degree.

## PARENTS' EDUCATION

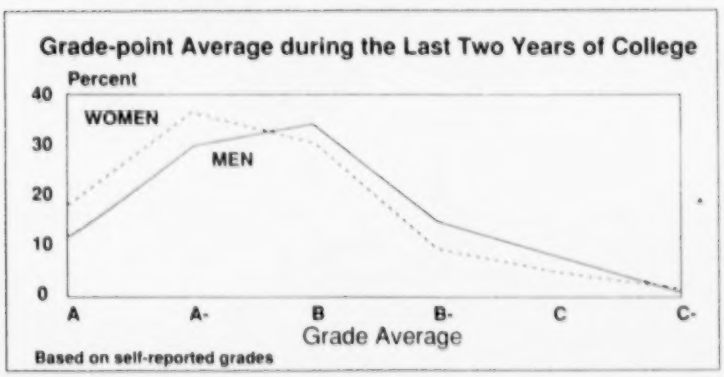
Among the prospective M.Div. students in our sample, on the average, the parents of women had more formal education than the parents of men. In fact, among the women, 12 percent had mothers with a graduate or professional degree, and 24 percent had fathers with a graduate or professional degree. These figures were identical for the total GRE population of women.

Men in the sample of prospective M.Div. students came from families with less formal education than women in the sample, and they came from families with less formal education than the GRE population as a whole. Only 17 percent of the male "prospectives" had fathers with a graduate or professional degree, and 6 percent had mothers with either of those degrees. In the GRE population as a whole, the figures are 12 and 26 percent, respectively, for the percentage of men having mothers and fathers with graduate or professional degrees.

These observations are consistent with the research by Carroll et al (1983) in which the authors found that across most denominations ordaining women, female clergy have better-educated parents than male clergy.

## UNDERGRADUATE GRADE-POINT AVERAGE

Consistent with the gender differences in GRE score averages among prospective M.Div. students, women also reported receiving higher undergraduate grades than men, on the average. The following graph shows the distribution of self-reported overall grade average during the last two years of college among prospective M.Div. students.




The overall grade average was most often an A- for women and a B for men. A greater proportion of women than men reported earning an average of A or A-.

## UNDERGRADUATE MAJOR

People planning to study theology come from quite diverse backgrounds. Over the years studied, our sample contained people with undergraduate majors in 137 different fields, including such areas as agriculture, chemistry, criminal justice, elementary education, finance, and dental sciences. Nearly half of the sample majored in some area of the arts and humanities. The next most common broad area of study was the social sciences, followed by the natural sciences and engineering.

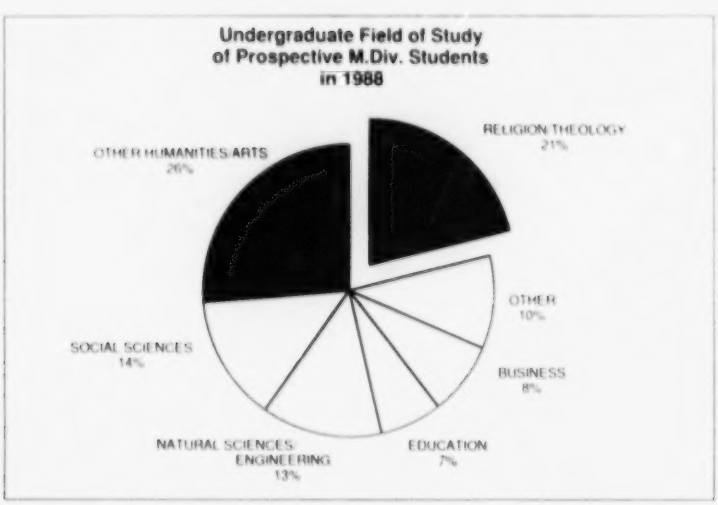
From 1981 to 1988, the distribution of undergraduate major fields did not change significantly. The following pie chart shows that in 1988, 21 percent of our sample had majored in religion or theology as undergraduates. Another 26 percent majored in the remaining areas of the arts and humanities. Nearly half of the prospective M.Div. students, therefore, had earned their bachelor's degrees in some area of arts and humanities.

Not surprisingly, the undergraduate majors of men and women tended to be different. Women were more likely than men to have majored in education, while men were more likely than women to have majored in religion, theology, or business. It is interesting to note that although 21 percent of our total sample had majored in religion or theology, these fields of study were more common among the men. Only 15 percent of the women had majored in religion or theology, and of these women, very few majored in theology. On the other hand, 24 percent of the men had majored in religion or theology, and of these men, more than half majored in theology.

To some degree, but not entirely, the gender differences can be attributed to age differences. Those who were younger and planning for a first career (primarily men) were more likely to have majored in religion or theology in preparation for the ministry. Older and second-career people were more likely to have majored in education, engineering, nursing, or other fields in preparation for their first career. Younger men were also more likely than older men to have degrees in psychology or a humanities area.

The great diversity in the educational backgrounds of our sample reflects Farley's (1983) assertions that "almost no theological school can presuppose anything about an admitted student's educational background except the bare fact of the B.A. degree." As he states:

*Most [theological] schools list desiderata for the student's college preparation, but these are not specific conditions for admission. A college education, even a liberal arts education, now means an enormous variety of things . . . In short, there is some question as to whether seminary-level work can presuppose the liberal arts education which theological studies have always required. (Farley, 1983)*



| Undergraduate Major Field Area | Average Verbal Score | Fathers with four years college |
|---|---|---|
| Natural Sciences/Engineering | 544 | 49% |
| Arts & Other Humanities | 528 | 39% |
| Social Sciences | 515 | 39% |
| Education | 504 | 38% |
| Business | 474 | 38% |
| RELIGION/THEOLOGY | 471 | 33% |

## RELATIONSHIP OF GRE SCORES TO UNDERGRADUATE MAJOR

One might expect, as Farley apparently did, that students with a strong academic foundation in religion would be the best candidates for graduate theological studies. In addition, we would expect the best candidates to have high verbal skills. What we found, however, is that prospective M.Div. students with degrees in religion and theology do not compare favorably in verbal reasoning skills with students who have degrees in many other fields.

From the 1988 data, we found that the GRE verbal score averages were lowest among those prospective M.Div. students with degrees in religion or theology and highest among those with degrees in engineering or natural sciences.

It is impossible to explain, from test scores alone, why students who major in one particular field should have a lower verbal score than students with degrees in other fields. To some extent, verbal skills are acquired prior to college entrance, and to some extent verbal skills are enhanced by the undergraduate program. Students whose parents are college graduates tend to score higher on verbal tests than do students whose parents have less formal education. We therefore looked at the educational backgrounds of parents of those prospective M.Div. students with undergraduate degrees in religion compared with students with majors in other fields.

The table above shows the undergraduate major field area of prospective M.Div. students in 1988, their mean GRE verbal score, and the percentage of fathers having a four-year college degree.

We see that the rank ordering of average test scores was the same as the rank ordering of the percentage of fathers having a four-year college degree. Only one-third of the prospective M.Div. students with a degree in religion or theology had fathers with a four-year college degree; that group also had the lowest average test score. Nearly half of the prospective M.Div. students with degrees in natural sciences or engineering had fathers with a four-year college degree; that group also had the highest verbal score average. Similar patterns held for the quantitative and analytical score averages and for men and women separately. There was some slight relationship between test score averages and mother's education, but it was not strong, not even for the women in the sample.

In summary, the typical profiles of prospective M.Div. students are as follows: Those who majored in religion or theology are likely to have parents with less than a college education and are likely to earn relatively low GRE scores. Those who majored in other fields, especially engineering and natural sciences, are more likely to have college-educated parents and to score relatively high on the GRE.

In addition to looking at undergraduate major fields, we also examined the coursework taken by prospective M.Div. students in various academic subjects. A frequent course selection was psychology. Eighty-six percent of the sample had taken at least one psychology course. Seventy percent had taken at least one sociology course. Women typically had taken more psychology and sociology courses than men.

Three-fourths of the sample had taken at least one philosophy course. Three-fourths had also taken at least one foreign language course. In general, the men had taken more philosophy and foreign language courses than the women.

## HONORS, ACHIEVEMENTS, AND WORK EXPERIENCE

The 1988 GRE data showed that nearly 8 percent of prospective M.Div. students had written a book or an article that appeared in a professional journal or other national publication. This figure was higher for women than for men (12 percent vs 6 percent). Twenty percent of the sample (28 percent of the women and 17 percent of the men) had been elected to a national honor society. Men, more often than women, received honors or awards in athletics or student government, while women more often received literary awards or recognition for community service while in college.

The GRE questionnaire did not elaborate on the type of community service that examinees performed, but it did ask for the number of hours per week devoted to community service. One-fourth of our sample reported having received honors or recognition for community service. Half of the sample reported spending beween one and five hours per week in community service, and 5 percent reported spending more than 20 hours per week. Women spent slightly more time in community service than men and women received more awards and recognition than men for community service.

In addition to spending time on academic studies, extracurricular activities, and community service, the majority of prospective M.Div. students reported that they worked for wages while they were in school. Thirty percent reported that they had worked more than 20 hours a week while in college. Only one-fourth of the sample had not worked as students. Men and women did not differ significantly in the number of hours per week they had worked.

## NEED FOR FINANCIAL AID

One-half of the women indicated that their enrollment would depend upon receiving financial aid. Thirty-six percent of the men expressed the same degree of financial need. Women often have greater difficulty than men in financing their graduate education because they are less likely to be married and therefore less likely to have a spouse contributing to their support. (In the next report in this series, we will explore the financial aspect of a seminary education and its relationship to marital status.) Another reason for the lesser financial need among men may be that the sample includes men (and not women) intending to become Roman Catholic priests. For Roman Catholics, educational costs are borne either by their diocese or by religious orders. A major concern of most other theology students, however, is paying for their education, and their concerns have been expressed in a number of articles (*Christian Century*, 1987; Walters-Bugbee, 1981).

We have evidence from earlier studies that parental financial contribution to a son's or daughter's graduate study in the humanities is quite low compared with the parental contribution to study in more lucrative areas, such as medicine. (See Flamer & Horch, 1982; Grandy & Courtney, 1985.) We recognize, as Carroll (1983) did, that in an already low-paying profession, women's salaries tend to be lower than men's. As a result, even if all financially needy M.Div. students could obtain education loans, many of them, especially women, might find them difficult to repay. It is unfortunate that a large number of high-ability GRE examinees, especially women, hoping to obtain an M.Div. will probably be unable to do so unless adequate financial resources become available.

## CONCLUSIONS

The message of this report is a mixed one. Many prospective candidates for ordained ministry have outstanding records of academic achievement, especially the top third of the women in our sample. However only one-fifth of the men have records that are equally good.

One implication of our findings is that students with bachelor's degrees in religion may not have academic skills as



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strong as those coming from other fields. This is not to say that the undergraduate programs are inadequate. We saw that students studying religion tended to have parents with less formal education, and we might therefore expect them to enter college with less experience in dealing with abstract verbal reasoning. But efforts to strengthen their verbal skills and their analytical/critical reasoning skills, both at the undergraduate and the seminary level, may improve the academic quality of seminary graduates.

Our study also showed that the older students in our sample perform as well in verbal reasoning skills as younger students. It is more important to know what people have been studying, or the nature of the work they have been doing, than to know their age.

We cannot generalize the results of this study, which is based on such a limited sample, to the entire population of seminary students. But admissions committees may wish to review applicant records more closely in light of our findings.

We will make the GRE more useful to seminary and denominational officials by including, in 1992, on the background questionnaire, an option of "ordained ministry/rabbinate" as a field of study. This will also enable us in our research to study the records of those examinees who definitely intend to enter ministry.

We welcome questions about our research and will find your comments or suggestions for future editions of this type of report very useful.

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## APPENDIX

***Institutions Receiving GRE Scores by Denominational Affiliation***

*American Baptist Churches*
American Baptist Seminary of the West
Andover Newton Theological School
Colgate Rochester Divinity School
Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary
Northern Baptist Theological Seminary

*Baptist General Conference*
Bethel Theological Seminary

*Conservative Baptist Association of America*
Denver Conservative Baptist Seminary

*Independent Baptist*
Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary

*Southern Baptist Convention*
Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary
Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary
Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

*Christian Church and Churches of Christ*
Emmanuel School of Religion

*Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)*
Brite Divinity School
Lexington Theological Seminary

*Christian Reformed Church*
Calvin Theological Seminary

*Church of the Brethren*
Bethany Theological Seminary

*Episcopal Church*
Church Divinity School of the Pacific
Episcopal Divinity School
Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest
General Theological Seminary

Nashotah House
Seabury-Western Theological Seminary
Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry
University of the South School of Theology
(Virginia) Protestant Episcopal Theological Seminary

*Evangelical Covenant Church of America*
North Park Theological Seminary

*Evangelical Free Church of America*
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

*Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*
Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg
Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary
Trinity Lutheran Seminary

*Greek Orthodox Archdiocese*
Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology

*Inter/Nondenominational*
Asbury Theological Seminary
Fuller Theological Seminary
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary
Graduate Theological Union
Harvard University Divinity School
Interdenominational Theological Center
New York Theological Seminary
Pacific School of Religion
Reformed Theological Seminary
Union Theological Seminary (NY)
University of Chicago Divinity School
Vanderbilt University Divinity School
Western Evangelical Seminary
Yale University Divinity School

*Judaism - Conservative and Reformed*
Hebrew Union College
Jewish Theological Seminary

*Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod*
Concordia Seminary (St. Louis)
Concordia Seminary (Fort Wayne)

*Mennonite Brethren Church in North America*
Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary

*Presbyterian Church (USA)*
Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary
Columbia Theological Seminary
Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary
McCormick Theological Seminary
Pittsburgh Theological Seminary
Princeton Theological Seminary
San Francisco Theological Seminary
Union Theological Seminary in Virginia

*Roman Catholic Church*
Catholic Theological Union
Catholic University
Christ the King Seminary
Immaculate Conception Seminary
Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley
Kenrick Seminary
Maryknoll Seminary
Mount Angel Seminary
Mount St. Mary's Seminary
Notre Dame Seminary
Oblate College
Pontifical College Josephinum
Saint Charles Borromeo Seminary
Saint Francis Seminary
Saint John's Seminary (Brighton)
Saint John's Seminary (Camarillo)
Saint John's University School of Theology
Saint Joseph's Seminary
Saint Mary Seminary
Saint Mary's Seminary and University
Saint Meinrad School of Theology
Saint Patrick's Seminary
Saint Paul Seminary
Saint Vincent Seminary
Seminary of the Immaculate Conception
University of Notre Dame, Department of Theology
University of Saint Thomas, School of Theology
Washington Theological Union
Weston School of Theology

***Unitarian Universalist Association***
Meadville/Lombard Theological Seminary
Starr King School for Ministry

***United Church of Christ***
Chicago Theological Seminary
Eden Theological Seminary
Lancaster Theological Seminary
United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities

***United Methodist Church***
Boston University School of Theology
Candler School of Theology
Claremont School of Theology
Drew University Theological School
Duke University Theological School
Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary
Iliff School of Theology
Methodist Theological School in Ohio
Perkins School of Theology
Saint Paul School of Theology
United Theological Seminary
Wesley Theological Seminary

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